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Thurston. Sermon at the Ordination
of Rev. Josiah Tucker. 1826

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SERMON

PREACHED, MAY 10, 1826,

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. JOSIAH TUCKER

OVER THE

Congregational Church and Society

IN

MADISON.

—♦♦♦♦—
BY DAVID THURSTON,
PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN WINTHROP.

—♦♦♦♦—
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A SERMON.

I TIMOTHY, IV, 6.

....A GOOD MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST....

To the inquiry, what constitutes a good minister, or servant, of Christ, the same answer would not be given by all. For men differ very widely in their views of what the gospel contains, of the qualifications requisite for dispensing it, of the appropriate duties of the office, and of the particular effects, which it is desirable should be produced. Still, however, it is to be presumed, that no one assumes the sacred function without intending to be what he considers "a good minister of Jesus Christ." The most lax in sentiment, feeling, and practice design to be, at least, something near what they judge a minister should be. For no man can live quietly, while conscious that he is greatly at variance with what he deems his duty. Every person will exert himself to be conformed to his standard, to have his character agree with his principles. A perception of constant self-inconsistence is a source of disquietude, which no man can long endure.

Hence the vast importance that young men, when entering upon *any course* of life, should take a correct and elevated standard. For it is much easier to lower the standard, to bring it down to the feelings and conduct; than it is to raise the feelings and conduct to a more strict and severe rule.

Hence also the fact, that *generally*, when men's principles and practice undergo much change, it is on the side of relaxation. Instances of the reverse, except a radical change of character takes place, are exceedingly rare. It has not unfrequently occurred, that young men, who commenced the work

of the ministry with sentiments strictly evangelical, have at length gradually sunk into all the laxness of Socinianism. They have broken over all the restraints of early instruction and education, of their serious convictions and solemn resolutions, which they have learned to denominate superstition and bigotry; and have baptized their apostasy by the imposing name of *increased liberality*. On the other hand, how seldom have those who begun the ministry with vague and low sentiments, unless they have been made the subjects of renewing grace, adopted purer and more discriminating views!

To meditate on some of the distinctive traits in the character of a good minister of Jesus Christ, will be not less in accordance with the occasion, than with the text.

The first requisite, is *love to Christ*. Who can be a good servant to a master whom he does not love? A heart in which "the love of God has been shed abroad by the Holy Ghost," is the mainspring of the various movements of a good minister of Christ. A glowing affection for him, who shed his precious blood to redeem a revolted world from sin and woe, admits of no substitute. The lovely temperament of John, and the boldness of Peter; the tenderness of Jeremiah, and the fortitude of Paul; the wisdom of Solomon, and the eloquence of Apollos, all combined, would by no means supply its place. All these he might possess, and still retain "a carnal mind at enmity with God." With the philosophy of a Newton, the metaphysical research of an Edwards; with ability to solve all mysteries and repeat all the miracles, wrought by prophets and apostles; with the light and power of an angel, he might be cold and dead. Love to Christ is the constraining principle, which excites every energy of the soul to action. How can he be a good minister, who does not love Him, who, in compassion to a perishing world, cheerfully submitted to a life of the humblest poverty, to labours the most exhausting, indignities the most shameful, and to sufferings altogether unparalleled? This love is the groundwork of every holy affection. It prepares the mind for the exercise of repentance for sin, faith in Christ, peace, joy, hope, brotherly union, and the whole

train of christian graces. It lays the foundation of that spiritual discernment, destitute of which he cannot explain, or even understand many things contained in that code of laws, the sacred scriptures, by which, as a servant of Christ, he is to regulate his official conduct. Ignorant of the character and laws of his sovereign, of the conditions of reconciliation, an ambassador is ill prepared to treat with the inhabitants of a revolted province. To understand the Bible correctly, the state of feeling must, in some degree, accord with that of the holy men by whom it was penned. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "Were interpretations always intellectually correct, it would be a most ruinous calamity to acquire the habit of *viewing the truths of the Bible without emotion*. It would induce a hardened speculative correctness. The expositions of a man, who should explain the word of God with intellectual correctness, but at the same time without corresponding feelings, would be powerless in exciting emotion in others. They would be like the rays of the moon upon a surface of ice, though clear, yet cold. If the Bible is regarded merely as a literary production, and its interpretation as *merely an intellectual exercise*, the mind insensibly acquires a habit of deciding questions without a due sense of their important consequences. But the decisions of the Bible are decisions for eternity. How immeasurably dangerous, then, is that spirit, which can permit a man to dissect the word of God without care and reverence, as the anatomist would dissect a dead body, and to adopt hastily new theories, or new interpretations, of which he has not seen all the bearings. The constant influence of holy feelings is needed as a preventive of these effects, and a balance-wheel in the mind."

Destitute of love, a servant will not be *disposed* to apply himself with diligence to know exactly what his Master would have him do. This would certainly disqualify him from being a good servant. As supreme love to Christ is indispensable to a right understanding of the Bible; it is much more necessary

to *incline* and *enable* him to obey its precepts. Affection for his divine Master will render him jealous for his honour, and excite grief for those who slight and reject him. This will lead him to resolve, "not to know anything save Jesus Christ, and him crucified; to seek not his own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's." This will influence him to "take heed unto himself." He will believe what he calls upon others to believe; to practise those virtues which he recommends; and to avoid those sins which he condemns. He will strive to enforce his preaching by his example. He will therefore be a man of prayer. Having learned his own weakness and imperfection, that "without Christ, he can do nothing," he will be a constant, humble, fervent suppliant at the throne of grace. He will depend wholly on Christ for success.

A second distinctive trait in the character of a good minister of Christ, is *an intimate acquaintance with the human character*. Without a knowledge of the deep depravity of his own heart, how can he describe that of others? Had he never felt the condemning power of the divine law; had he never known "the terrors of the Lord"; he could not speak experimentally of "the wormwood and the gall." Unhumbled, his heart a stranger to godly sorrow, and evangelical faith, he would be poorly prepared to point the trembling, broken-hearted sinner from the verge of despair to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Taught by his own case, that "all flesh has corrupted his way before God"; that all are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins"; that they lie wholly at the sovereign mercy of God; wholly averse to return to him; that their only hope is in the atonement of the Lord Jesus, who is truly God; that eternal punishment in hell is their just desert; he is qualified, as he could not otherwise be, feelingly to describe the ruined, guilty state of men, as transgressors, and to urge them to flee from "the wrath to come." Having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and found peace in believing, he can portray the christian's character; delineate his various graces, his conflicts, sorrows, and comforts.

A third trait, is *talents and attainments sufficient to secure re-*

spect. The scriptures do not teach us, that an extraordinary degree of genius, penetration, or learning is indispensable. But the very nature of the duties, which he is to perform, absolutely demands a good share of common talents, of common sense in particular. It is not by foolish preaching, though it is "by the foolishness of preaching, that it pleases God to save them that believe." A weak and uninformed mind by no means disqualifies a man from being a sincere and acceptable worshipper of God, or follower of the Lamb; but it must surely render him unfit to "preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." He should have natural endowments and education sufficient to elevate him rather above the common level of his fellow-men. "God has never sanctified ignorance, or consecrated it to his service, since it is the effect of the fall, and the consequence of our departure from the Fountain of intelligence." On this subject, Paul is explicit; "not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." "He must be able to teach others; and be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Not only is a deep experimental and spiritual knowledge of the truths of the gospel necessary; but capacity to state them with clearness; to illustrate them with propriety; to defend them with ability; and to enforce them with energy. For he is to teach the most important subjects, a knowledge of which was ever communicated to men. Shall a man, unacquainted with the alphabet of learning, be employed to preach the deep things of God? The pastors and teachers after his own heart, whom God has promised to give his people, "were to feed them with knowledge and understanding." How then can the unskilful theologian be a good minister? No more absurd would it be to pronounce a man, ignorant of disease and of medicine, a good physician; than one, who has not a well-digested system of divinity, and a faculty to enlighten and instruct, a good minister of Jesus Christ.

To constitute an able minister of the New Testament, requires a familiar acquaintance with the philosophy of the human mind. For this bears very nearly the same relation to

theology, which anatomy does to the healing art. A knowledge of language affords many facilities for acquiring and communicating instruction in a clear and emphatic manner. Mathematics and natural philosophy expand and strengthen the mental faculties. Civil and ecclesiastical history throws much light upon the human character. Logic and rhetoric furnish important aid in the inculcation of truth upon the conscience and the heart.

Aware that it is the *sense and meaning*, rather than the *words* of scripture, with which he is to be familiar, he will be constantly solicitous to increase his knowledge, that he may more successfully "fulfil the ministry, which he has received of the Lord Jesus." But when he would most intimately learn the mind of Christ, he will bring all his talents and attainments to the foot of the cross. With the profoundest intellect and the most extensive erudition, he would sit at the feet of Jesus, humbly desiring "an unction from the Holy One," as by far the richest of all ministerial qualifications. This will inspire an inextinguishable love to perishing sinners; an invincible courage to encounter difficulties and dangers; an unshaken fortitude to bear privations and sufferings; and an untiring patience in labouring to win souls to Christ.

A fourth trait in the character of a good minister, is *tenderness*. That man egregiously errs, who imagines, that to be faithful, he must divest himself of all meekness and affection. Such a mode of address is suited rather to irritate than enlighten, to repel than to win. We are directed to pray and beseech men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God; and not, by shutting up all feelings of compassion, to seek by fire and storm to drive them to heaven. The good minister of Christ, remembering what were once his own character and state, can sympathize with those whom he views already and justly condemned. The truth may be exhibited as clearly and as fully in love and gentleness, as in anger and harshness. Truths the most awful, the most alarming, the most cutting, may be uttered with weeping, as well as menacing. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men,

in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves." He will be called to "reprove, to rebuke," even to rebuke "sharply"; but it must be "with all longsuffering." He will in this respect endeavour to imitate his divine Master, who, when pronouncing the fearful doom of the guilty inhabitants of Jerusalem, was so tenderly affected, that "he wept over them." "Knowing the terrors of the Lord," he persuades men. He cultivates tenderness of spirit, that he may "have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way."

A fifth trait of character, is *impartiality*. This does not imply that all are to be treated precisely in the same manner. "On some have compassion, making a difference; others save with fear." To be impartial is to avoid bestowing more attention upon some than upon others, without reason; or on account of any unreasonable prepossession. The good minister "takes heed to all the flock," as well the poor and the ignorant, as the rich and the learned. Though often suspected, he is not conscious of doing more for one than another from any selfish, or partial affection. "He remembers that all souls are rated at one value in his Master's book; that his Redeemer paid as much for the one as for the other. Civil differences must be civilly acknowledged; but these have no place in his spiritual administrations." "I charge thee," said Paul to Timothy, "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things, without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." He is not less strict in executing the laws of Christ's house upon those in the higher, than upon those in the lower walks of life. No heresy, or scandal will be tolerated. Error and vice will be discountenanced equally in the most elevated and in the most humble stations. "Them that sin, he will rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

A sixth trait in the character of a good minister, is *diligence in the discharge of his duties*. He is active. He suffers no talent to lie buried. He finds no time to be spent in unprofitable reading, studies, conversation, or visits. He always has employment sufficient to keep him at work. "Instant in

season and out of season," his labours are not confined to the sabbath, or the day. While others are resting from the cares and fatigues of life, he is often found sitting by the midnight lamp, intensely providing for the flock; meditating on their necessities; or wrestling in prayer for their eternal salvation. "Publicly, and from house to house, he teaches every man, and warns every man night and day, with tears, that he may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." On other days, as well as the sabbath, he has his lectures, conferences, meetings for prayer, and pastoral visits. To do as much as others, will not satisfy him, while he can do more. He is willing to spend and be spent in seeking the everlasting good of the souls committed to his care.

"Indeed, it is not so much the *expense* of our labours, as the *loss* of them, that kills us. Other labourers find their work as they leave it; so do not we. Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do. The impressions, we make on our people's souls by one sermon, vanish before the next. Yea, we must fight in defence of the truths we preach, as well as study them to paleness, and preach them to faintness. But well spent head, heart, lungs, and all; welcome pained breasts, aching backs, and trembling limbs, if we can by all approve ourselves faithful servants, and hear that joyful voice from his mouth, Well done, good and faithful servants."

A seventh trait, is *faithfulness*. As a man and a christian, he must be strictly fair, upright, and punctual in his dealings; universally circumspect in his speech and behaviour. "He is to be an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity. He is to be blameless, vigilant, sober, given to hospitality, a lover of good men, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous, and have a good report of them that are without." He is to be generous, humane, and accessible. While he magnifies his office, and maintains the dignity of his station by a scrupulous avoidance of what is light and trifling in his conversation and conduct; he must demean himself in such a manner as not to keep the lowest and youngest at too

great a distance. He studies to be condescending without meanness, and familiar without coarseness.

In the various duties of his office, while he "seeks not to please men, but God, who trieth his heart," he endeavours to "commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." In seeking to find out "acceptable words," he is careful not to veil the truth, nor blunt its edge to spare the depraved feelings of men. He aims to have it "quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and become a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." He presents the truth clearly to the view of his hearers. He faithfully presses its naked point upon the heart. They understand him; they know what he means.

He preaches the truth fully. He does "not shun to declare all the counsel of God." Unlike the man who has his favourite topics, to which he confines his discourses, he takes in the whole range of evangelical truth. The scriptures contain subjects amply diversified; doctrinal, experimental, and practical subjects. He treats upon the doctrines, invitations, precepts, exhortations, promises, admonitions, counsels, warnings, and threatenings; the various subjects suited to excite fear and hope, joy and grief, love and hatred, faith and despair; such as are adapted to excite gratitude, humility, penitence, self-denial, the spirit of forgiveness, and every holy affection. All these are handled with skilful and faithful reference to the state and circumstances of the flock.

He wisely discriminates. He not only describes men as being either saints or sinners, but descends to the various shades of difference, which the two great divisions of men exhibit. His instructions are accommodated to the various classes; the young and the aged, rulers and subjects, ministers and people, parents and children, neighbours and friends. He rightly divides the word of truth, "giving to each a portion in due season." He has a word for the enlightened, humble, warm-hearted, exemplary believer; and for him who is undecided and doubting; for him in whom the love of this present world

is the besetting sin, or the lust of flesh, or the pride of life; for him who is inconstant in his zeal; for the unguarded, the self-confident, the dejected and distrustful.

Among the ungodly are found many shades of difference. He divides the word so as to meet the respective peculiarities of the heedless, unconcerned sinner, the presumptuous, the scorner, the rude, the dissolute, the amiable, decent moralist, the thoughtful, the awakened, the convinced, the almost christian, the false professor, and the specious hypocrite.

He is a discriminating, searching preacher. He clearly points out the distinction between the precious and the vile. He shows the sinner the fallacy of his excuses, and exposes the futility of all his self-justifying pleas. He searches out his hiding-places, and tears away his various refuges of lies. When pierced by divine truth, the sword of the Spirit, his wounds are not slightly healed. While on the one hand, he guards against breaking "the bruised reed," or quenching "the smoking flax"; on the other, he is equally cautious, not to "daub with untempered mortar," or to "cry, Peace, when God has not spoken peace." He is a "son of thunder," or a "son of consolation," as circumstances require.

He faithfully applies the truth. He makes his hearers feel, that his discourses meet their case. "Thou art the man." He preaches closely. He brings the truth home to their own bosoms. He suffers them not to lose sight of their guilt and perishing state as sinners; of the only way of recovery, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ; of the indispensable necessity of special divine influences to incline men to accept the terms of salvation; nor of their immediate duty to repent, believe, and obey the gospel. Without respect of persons, he insists most strongly and frequently upon those points, which are of the highest importance. *

His great object is to prepare men for heaven. For this he studies, he prays, preaches, and converses. He diligently and faithfully consecrates himself to his Master's service; strives to promote his honour, advance his kingdom; and is never so happy as when the Lord Jesus receives the affection, trust, obe-

dience, and homage, which are his due. Fidelity to the souls of men characterizes his ministry. Called to watch for them as one who must give an account, he trembles lest any of them should be lost through his negligence. He shudders at the thought of having their "blood required at his hand."

APPLICATION.

1. The christian ministry is truly a laborious work. That a man may sustain the office of a christian minister, and live at his ease, is indeed possible. But that any one can do this, and be a good minister of Jesus Christ, is absolutely impossible. Many greatly underrate the labours and trials of this holy calling. They look upon its duties as demanding but a very moderate share of self-denial and exertion. But woe be to the man, who enters the vineyard of the Lord with such expectations! Only reflect a moment upon what a minister has to do. He has to "take heed to himself"; to watch over his own heart and life; to resist all the corrupt propensities of his own nature, all the temptations of Satan, all the snares of the world, and all the allurements, spread around him by enemies and friends. How many eyes are fastened upon him! His own spirit and practice exert an influence upon the eternal destinies of men. What a weight of responsibility rests upon him as "set for the defence of the gospel," and as having immortal souls committed to his care. He has to "take heed to his doctrine." How many truths he has to discuss! how many doctrines to explain and defend! how many duties to illustrate and enforce! how many cavils to meet, objections to obviate, inquiries to answer, and doubts to solve!

In taking "heed to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made him an overseer," how various are the duties, both public and private, which he has to perform! With what a diversity of characters and tempers he has to deal! What life-exhausting pains he must bestow to provide "milk for babes, and strong meat for them of full age"! What skill is requisite in the case of tried and tempted souls! Is this a work in which a man may take his ease; a station in which he may find va-

cant hours, and feel himself at leisure? "He sees a company of ignorant, carnal, miserable sinners, before his face, who must be changed or damned. He hears their condition crying out for help, the most speedy help. Their misery speaks the louder, because they have no heart to seek for help themselves. While he sees so many in such manifest danger of being everlastingly undone; while he looks upon them as being within a step of hell," his spirit is stirred within him. He feels oppressed with the weight of his charge. His heart would die within him, were it not for the gracious promises: "Lo, I am with you always: my grace is sufficient for thee."

2. To be a good minister of Jesus Christ is the highest privilege ever conferred on man. It is to be "a steward of the mysteries of God"; a co-worker with the great Jehovah in promoting the highest interest of the universe. No employment subjects a man to such trials; no employment inspires with such joys. It is the most difficult and delightful, the most humiliating and the most dignified service, which a poor son of Adam's race was ever called to perform. To treat with creatures engaged in a rebellion the most ungrateful, absurd, and criminal, upon their reconciliation to the best Being in the universe; to be instrumental of converting sinners from the error of their ways, of hiding a multitude of sins and saving souls from death, by preaching Christ, is an honour to which the highest seraph before the throne of the infinite Majesty, was never admitted. Compared with this,

. "the laurels,
Which a Cæsar reaps, are weeds."

"What an excellent life it is to live in studying and preaching Christ; to be still searching into his mysteries, or feeding on them; to be daily in the consideration of the blessed nature, works, or ways of God! Others are glad of the leisure of the Lord's day, and now and then an hour besides, when they can lay hold of it; but we may keep a continual sabbath. We may do nothing else, almost, but study and talk of God and glory, and call upon him, and drink in his sacred, saving truths. Our

employment is all high and spiritual. Whether we be alone, or with others, our business is for another world. O, were our hearts but thoroughly suited to this work, what a blessed, joyful life we should live! How sweet would our study be to us! how pleasant the pulpit! and what delight would our conference of these things afford!" *

THE PASTOR ELECT : MY DEAR BROTHER,

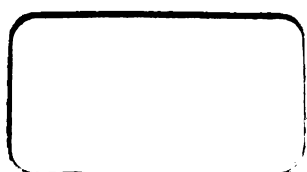
By consenting thus to appear before the all-seeing God,^{*} and this congregation of your fellow-men, you proclaim your desire to be invested with "the ministry of reconciliation." You are saying to all, who now behold you, that it is the settled purpose of your heart, to be *a good minister of Jesus Christ*. We trust you are sincere in this declaration. When told that you are entering on a work, the full magnitude of which no human tongue can describe, which no human mind can conceive; the language, we doubt not, is in perfect accordance with your feelings. To have it in charge to train up sinful beings, immortal and invaluable, for the retributions of eternity, cannot fail to impress, deeply and solemnly to impress your spirit. You feel yourself to be a man, a young man, a fallible man, an imperfectly sanctified man; and yet you are about to assume a weight of obligation, under which an angel, unsupported, might sink. Do you tremble? are you ready to shrink back, exclaiming, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Remember, you are to be the servant of Jesus Christ. Is he not a good Master? Will he task you beyond your strength? He is wisdom itself: will he not then guide you? He is full of grace and truth: will he not then strengthen you? He has an almighty arm: surely, then, he will sustain you. Yes, my brother, only be "a good minister of Jesus Christ," and he will finally say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Let this suffice.†

* Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*; a book which every minister ought to peruse.

† The customary address to the church and society was omitted, because this part was properly assigned to another member of the council.

My hearers, is it your intention to spend your eternity in heaven or in hell? For which are you preparing? If you devote yourselves to the service of Jesus Christ; in penitence and faith, rest on him as your only hope; if you possess his spirit, and walk in his steps, he will ere long deliver you from the sufferings of the present life; cleanse you from every remaining pollution; and receive you to the mansions he has gone to prepare for you, where you will be ever with him to behold his glory.

But if you have not yet commenced the work of preparation by repenting of your sins, and believing on the Lord Jesus, you cannot, without increasing your guilt and your danger, delay it *any* longer. God commands you, as your first duty, to repent. He commands you to do this *now*. Then, you have no right to do anything before you repent. This command lies across your path, and you cannot take another step with an impenitent heart, without trampling the authority of the great God under your feet. You have no right to eat, or to drink, until you have repented. Will you defer to a future opportunity what God requires you to do *now*? You have no right to leave this house, no, not to arise from your seats, with impenitent hearts. If you do, you will rise up in rebellion against that "God who now commands all men every where to repent."



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